

HISTORY OF THE

PLAGUE IN BOMBAY



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# HISTORY OF THE PLAGUE IN BOMBAY

BY

B. F. PATELL, B.A.,

*First Master, Elphinstone High School.*



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## PREFACE.

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THE Plague of 1896-97 forms an incident of grave importance in the history of the city, and copious records will no doubt soon be published, with facts, figures and a vast multitude of small particulars so as to make such works as complete as possible, and, indeed, very valuable to a student of the subject. It is a question, however, if such records are equally interesting to the general reader. Dry details with labyrinths of figures and long disquisitions have a tendency to pall upon the reader, and only a few can be found with patience enough to read such books through.

This little book is intended to give the reader in a very general form the most salient features of the last visitation.

Though verse has been attempted, as it seemed to fall in with the subject easily enough, and is likely to make the book more readable, exaggeration has been avoided and the facts may be relied on as treated with the proverbial veracity of an historian.

A few notes are added at the end bearing out the text for the information of the distant reader.

## INTRODUCTION.

---

THE city was smiling in plenty and  
peace,  
Contented her people and well at  
their ease ;  
When in crept the Plague like the  
Serpent of old,  
Dark author of slaughter and mis-  
chief untold.

What terror, what panic now reigns  
in the land !  
Face to face 'gainst a foe all un-  
heard-of they stand ;  
A foe so mysterious, so subtle his  
ways,  
Unchecked and unconquered, sad  
havoc he plays.

No measures omitted that science  
dictates ;

But science avails not, so cruel the  
Fates !

Her weapons are pow'rless, her ar-  
moury fails,

Unflinching the enemy, before him  
she quails.

The scourge of the poor, their implac-  
able foe,

Unnumbered his victims, he revels  
in woe.

All helpless as children they moan  
and they rave,

They look to their rulers the city to  
save.

These stint not in silver, nor stint  
they in toil,

Their labours untiring he threatens  
to foil ;



His army of microbes, a murderous  
host,  
Derides their vain efforts, for all they  
may boast.

For three painful years, with short  
respites of rest,  
Hath Bombay been tried by this terrible guest.

May God, in His mercy unbounded,  
restore  
This suffering city to quiet once  
more !



## The Plague of Bombay.

---

I STAND in Mandvi, all around,  
With cries of woe the streets resound.  
This quarter, crowded at the best,  
First falls a victim to the pest.  
The "Jains" and "Bhatias," sad to tell,  
First in alarming numbers fell ;  
In every home a death or two  
Meets the bewildered gazer's view.  
These sects seemed as picked out to  
bear  
Alone the burden of despair ;  
The other races, as yet free,  
Could not the lurking danger see ;  
Half callous to their neighbours' woes,  
The plague disturbed not their repose ;  
But soon all undeceived they stand,  
The Ravager, with scythe in hand,

Scours every corner of the land.  
For Parsi, Hindu, Moslem, Jew,  
And minor races not a few,  
Now find, who once felt quite secure,  
The tyrant knocking at their door.  
From place to place they shift in town,  
Vain hope ! They cannot fly his frown.  
This subtle, this insidious foe,  
Like serpent crawling, noiseless, slow,  
With deadly fangs, on slaughter bent,  
As by some power mysterious sent,  
Into the city makes his way,  
And all unwelcome, comes to stay ;  
His 'prentice hand on vermin tries,  
Then casts on man his gloating eyes.  
For rats and mice first warning gave  
To people of their danger grave ;  
These perished in uncommon wise,  
Cause of grave unrest and surprise ;  
In godowns by the hundred found,  
Followed by human deaths around ;

This mystic slaughter harassed too  
 E'en private houses not a few.

"Dead rats!" What fears these words  
 implied!

What panic dread to death allied!  
 For where they found a dying mouse,  
 Some must of Plague die in that  
 house.

From mice to menials first it flew,  
 Then seized the better classes too.

What various theories now are aired,  
 By men as much perplexed as scared;  
 Some thought 'twas due to want of  
 rain;

Some laid it down to rancid grain,  
 Ten thousand bags in "godowns"  
 piled,

From light and air for years exiled;  
 The drains with filth of years were  
 clogged

The soil, some said, was water-logged ;  
 Some thought the Plague from Hong-  
                   kong came,

And cursed that port as most to  
                   blame ;

Some judgment gave 'gainst Muscat  
                   dates ;

The more resigned said 'twas the  
                   Fates.

Nor rancid grain, nor scanty rains,  
 Nor long-neglected stinking drains,  
 Nor water-logging of the soil,

The pious said, caused this turmoil ;

Nor Hongkong silks, nor Muscat dates,

No ! none of these, not e'en the Fates ;

But Bombay's self, with sin o'ergrown,

Was reaping now what she had sown.

These taught the people now they must

In expiation put their trust,

In prayers and alms, and heaven  
                   knows what ;

The worldly-minded called this "rot."  
 A Parsee priest, with wisdom rare,  
 Now ventured boldly to declare  
 A new " fire-temple " just then built,  
 In th' eye of God a heinous guilt— !  
 Had roused His anger, and brought  
     down

Fell vengeance on the guilty town !  
 What people thought I need not say,  
 Such doctrines may have had their day.  
 This age of reason failed to see  
 The dustoor's quaint philosophy !  
 Each doctor had his theory too ;  
 How far it worked his patients knew ;  
 This much at least as daylight plain,  
 Most of them, soon put out of pain,  
 Ceased or to babble or complain.  
 But truth to tell, ta'en by surprise,  
 Each one a different nostrum tries,  
 None knows for sure where mischief  
     lies.

One thinks warm drinks and sudorifics,

Against the Plague the best specifics.

Another all his faith reposes,

In liberal mercurial doses ;

A third tries wet-sheet as a rule,

The ferment of the blood to cool ;

All work their best, but in the dark,

Much oftener miss than hit the mark.

The local officers seemed bent

A general panic to prevent ;

The people they would make believe

They had no cause to fear or grieve ;

“No plague ! no plague !” they still maintained,

All outside counsel they disdained ;

No wonder *infra dig.* they thought,

Their work by laymen to be taught.

For long they wrangled o'er the name ;

'Twas long before conviction came ;



But facts for trifling all too stern,  
 Made them to plainer terms return.  
 If plans were not all wisely laid,  
 Yet to their credit be it said,  
 From morn to eve right hard they  
     worked,

Nor duties most unpleasant shirked ;  
 Hard pressed, they fought with pluck  
     and go

This terrible, this unseen foe ;

But new to them, as new to all,

This unforeseen, this sudden call.

If then, perchance, things went awry,

No need, I ween, for hue and cry.

Before the city fathers came

This subject with a dreadful name ;

Incredulous, some stood aloof,

As waiting for yet further proof.

Some doctors of the Mandvi ward

Tried hard to put them on their  
     guard ;

They cited cases by the score,  
 Prompt action urged,—what could they  
     more ?

The corporators now propound  
 Conflicting theories full of sound ;  
 Each one attempting now to preach,  
 Himself in dark, the rest to teach !  
 No single head of light and leading,  
 To show a course of straight proceed-  
     ing.

In flushing drains and fumigation,  
 They seemed to put their whole sal-  
     vation ;

A weak attempt at segregation,  
 Creates much trouble and vexation.

If Mandvi had been tackled first,  
 Put under *cordon* at the worst,  
 Nipped in the bud, perchance, the  
     pest

Had in good time been put to rest.

The Plague meanwhile, all unrestrained,

Firm footing on the island gained ;  
 Southward it travelled ; Mody Bay  
 Prostrate before the tyrant lay ;  
 A crowded Parsee quarter, lo !  
 Became the scene of death and woe,  
 Then Fort, Colaba, Esplanade,  
 Were under contribution laid ;  
 Through Bhuleshwar it runs apace,  
 Chief centre of the " Bania " race ;  
 O'er Byculla, Parel, it passes,  
 Locations of the labouring classes ;  
 Bhendy Bazar, and Duncan Road,  
 Of Moslem poor the chief abode ;  
 Khetwady in its turn gets sick,  
 With Parsees mostly crowded thick ;  
 Nor Girgaum, Kalkadevi, smile,  
 The Bombay " Parbhu's " domicile,  
 No quarter in the city, see,  
 That's free from this calamity.

The rich were spared, the poorest fell,  
 In numbers grieves one's heart to tell.  
 They counted hundreds day by day,  
 Whole families clean swept away.  
 The reason's sure not far to seek,  
 Their humble diet, low physique,  
 Their filthy habits, rooted deep,  
 Enough to cause one's flesh to creep ;  
 Their dwellings void of air and light,  
 As dark at midday as at night,  
 O'er-crowded chawls where hundreds  
     lie,  
 Close-huddled like pigs in a sty—  
 The blessings of the open air,  
 A luxury to them as rare  
 As clothing rich or dainty fare.  
 Ill-clad, ill-fed, bare-foot they go,  
 Fit subjects of contagious woe.  
 If not the cause, surroundings these  
 Promoted much the fell disease.  
 For Plague his tens of thousand souls

Marked out for slaughter in these  
holes.

In native town distress now reigns ;  
Each day the Plague more vigour  
gains ;

'Twere long to tell the scenes of woe  
Enacted by this subtle foe ;

What countless lives untimely ta'en !  
In prime of youth what thousands  
slain !

In loving hearts what havoc made !  
What happy homesteads barren laid !  
Oh, woe to tell, the " butcher's bill "  
Through heart of stone would send a  
thrill ;

A loving mother, parent mild ;  
A sorrowing widow's only child ;  
A hopeful young one full of glee ;  
A father of a family ;

By thousands see such lowly laid  
Before the ruthless Reaper's blade ;

He mows them down like ears of  
 corn,  
 From parent stalk untimely torn ;  
 What mercy in a demon born !

Where once the pest a footing gains,  
 The home is doomed—no hope remains.  
 To-day the members all are well ;  
 Poor souls, they pity those who fell.  
 Their own sad fate who can foretell ?  
 To-morrow one feels very ill ;  
 He takes to bed though hoping still ;  
 The others nurse him with all care,  
 But hope is soon turned to despair ;  
 A day or two he lingers on,  
 A day or two, and he is gone ;  
 “ Oh ! spare the rest,” man helpless  
 cries.  
 Th’ Almighty wills it otherwise :  
 Of those that nursed him one or more,  
 Past hope, past cure, lie stricken soer,

Their race is run, now ends their day,  
 'Mid burning tears, they pass away ;  
 Thus one by one the members fall,  
 Obedient to their Maker's call.

Of all the tortures poets feign,  
 Prevail in Pluto's dark domain,  
 A tenth so keen, pray show me one,  
 As parents feel, when all undone,  
 A well-beloved child they weep,  
 Untimely snatched to eternal sleep.  
 And this of thousands now the lot,  
 Plague on thy course the darkest  
 spot !

The young, beginning just to shoot,  
 Lie low, cut down like unripe fruit ;  
 The old are spared to weep forlorn,  
 Their children from their bosom torn,  
 Helpless and sad, with bleeding heart,  
 They see their best beloved depart ;  
 So keen their sense of anguish deep,

All dazed, they half forget to weep.  
 Of more than one already 'reft,  
 They try to save what few are left.  
 Unto their country-homes they flee,  
 No chance of life elsewhere they see ;  
 For turn their eyes where'er they will,  
 There in the face death stares them still.

Now funerals in native streets  
 One by the dozen daily meets ;  
 With haste indecent hurried on,  
 All ceremonial, see, foregone ;  
 No mourners follow in the train,  
 The weeping kin at home remain ;  
 Nor long, for there they dare not stay,  
 But must all soon up and away ;  
 The house is flushed, all clothing  
     burned.

And out-of-doors the inmates turned.  
 Where, Death, thy harrowing terrors  
     reign,



E'en ties of blood are snapt atwain !  
Their sick to die, their dead to rot,  
The nearest leave, and fly the spot,  
All obligations clean forgot.

The funeral pyres present to view  
A ghastly sight, that pictures true,  
What havoc in the Hindu race  
The Pestilence doth work apace !  
Of lurid glow bright sheets of flame,  
That know no respite still proclaim,  
Let human skill do what she may,  
Death is the order of the day.

See loads of corpses day and night  
To ashed turned, what gruesome  
sight !

Now, while a dozen inside burn  
As many outside wait their turn.  
See, fuel stored up for all the year,  
In one short month doth disappear !  
Had all these corpses sought the  
ground

Where had sufficient space been  
found ?

The burial ground could hardly hold  
The bodies coming in ten-fold.

A lurking danger people dread  
In graveyards loaded with the dead.

No exception to the general strain,  
The " Towers of Silence " filled amain ;  
But vultures and a burning sun,  
Did all the cleansing to be done.

Though rumours came, from men per-  
chance,

Who view the Towers with eyes  
askance,

That bodies there half-eaten lay,  
And fetid smells rose night and day.

Enquiry set on foot soon gave  
Defiance to such scandal grave ;

No stink, no smell, by night or day,  
No bodies there half-eaten lay ;

The source of such reports, 'twas plain,

The workings of some idle brain.

Three potent agencies at work  
Now in the native bosom lurk ;  
Each with its terrors chills their  
    hearts,

Each drives them to outlying parts.  
The first and foremost, fear of death,  
Instinctive as the love of breath.

The city can no refuge give,  
In daily fear of death they live ;  
All faith annulled in human skill  
To help them out when stricken ill ;  
Unarmed, unequal to the fight,  
Discretion points the way to flight.  
Next came the segregation camp,  
And hospitals their spirits damp ;  
For at the very thought they start  
That from their dearest they should  
    part,

Just when they ailing, helpless lie,

And leave them in strange hands to  
die.

Though all intended for their good,  
As mere "zoolum" \* on this they brood ;  
Ill-natured rumour's sland'rous tongue  
Much mischief breeds the poor among ;  
Their feelings harrowed to the core,  
In Bombay they would stay no more.  
And last, not least, a serious dread  
By which the ignorant were led :  
Caste people oft could not be found  
To take a corpse to burning ground.  
This chiefly scared the Hindu race,  
For if unto its resting place  
A corpse was borne by lower caste,  
They thought it was defilement vast,  
Defilement expiation past ;  
And many a one thought this alone  
Sufficient reason to be gone.

---

\* Oppression.

A scene of pain but interest too  
At railway stations meets one's view,  
See crowded every local station,  
Declares a frightened, fleeing nation ;  
Men, women, children, servants all,  
Seem to obey one general call ;  
One general impulse drives them on,  
To quit the city and be gone.  
There's no rejoicing in the crowd,  
No cheerful faces, laughter loud,  
Their anxious looks and sighs declare  
Their hearts are fraught with gnawing  
    care,  
With pain and anguish of the mind,  
For those they have to leave behind.  
The men with bundles large and small,  
The women with the babies, all  
Litter the platform out and out,  
There's hardly room to move about.  
Now, thundering on, in comes the train,  
The long expectants rush amain ;

The scene is one of noise and bustle ;  
 See how they crowd and how they  
     hustle ;

Seats to secure no hopes they have,  
 Some standing room is all they crave.  
 They seize the doors, jump madly in,  
 Close-packed like sardines in a tin ;  
 Compartments made to carry ten,  
 Now loaded, see, with twenty men.

The whistle's given, the train departs  
 With heavy freight of sorrowing  
     hearts ;

And many, left behind, are fain  
 To wait for yet another train.

Nor railway lines alone conveyed  
 A nation frightened and dismayed ;  
 Ships, boats, and country craft their  
     fill

Of humble crowds kept carrying still.  
 Mill-hands, foregoing work and pay,

By thousands pour out every day ;  
 And menial servants of all grades,  
 And votaries of the humbler trades,  
 Hamal, masal, cook, ayah, syce,  
 Each one with bag and baggage flies ;  
 The dhobie,\* gavlai,† butcher, baker,  
 The barber, tailor and shoe-maker—  
 A motley crowd, all fleeing fast,  
 They think the town redemption past.  
 One only race immune stands out,  
 Well known for high physique, no doubt,  
 A race of healthy, stalwart men,  
 Out of their shoes full five-feet-ten ;  
 Aloof from natives and their ways,  
 Their cleanly habits worthy praise ;  
 Their diet rich as rich can be,  
 Not “ dal,”‡ and “ bhat ”§ with grains  
     and “ ghee,”¶  
 But beef and mutton, fowl and fish,

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\* Washerman.    † Milkman.

‡ Grain curry.    § Rice.    ¶ Clarified butter.

A pound helped out of every dish ;  
 Wine, whiskey and cigars to close,  
 And nights of undisturbed repose ;  
 Their dwellings open to the sea,  
 From all contamination free,  
 At Mal'bar Hill or Breach Candy ;  
 Well-ordered homes of health and ease,  
 With " khidmatgars " \* and what you  
     please ;

The European race I mean,  
 Untouched who 'scaped Plague's  
     horrors clean.

Themselves secure, their courage rose  
 While witnessing their neighbours'  
     woes ;

Right in the city they remained,  
 A fearless attitude maintained ;  
 See, open all their business places ;  
 Their games and sports and annual  
     races ;

---

\* Attendants, servants.



A few succumbed, a mere handful,  
But there the exception proved the  
rule.

The rich and independent sought  
Hill stations as the safest spot,  
Where, free from fear and gnawing  
care,

The children of a widespread scare,—  
They lived in ease and peace of mind,  
Infected Bombay left behind.

The labourers, on the other hand,  
Whose work is always in demand,  
No small nor unimportant class,  
Left for their country homes *en masse*.  
The middle classes had their work  
Right in the town ; they could not  
shirk ;

Unlike the labouring classes, they  
Could neither forfeit place nor pay,  
But must to duty every day.

These, hard beset, saw at a glance  
 Suburban homes their only chance ;  
 Malad, Goregaon, Andheri,  
 Santa Cruz, Kalyan, Borivli,  
 And many more unknown to fame,  
 Chief seats of camping-out became.  
 To these men fly, all dwelling space  
 Is seized upon in hurried race ;  
 Now sandy shore and paddy field  
 To some a crop of silver yield ;  
 More generous others, free for use,  
 Give out their lands to whoso choose.  
 Unsightly tracts, the stubble burned,  
 See into canvas cities turned !  
 To cadjan sheds some have recourse.  
 Small comfort there or ease, of course ;  
 Nor could such structures frail with-  
     stand  
 The nightly prowler's thieving hand.  
 But such discomforts, what were they,  
 To falling to the Plague a prey ?

The local trains could not sustain  
 The multiplying traffic's strain ;  
 Men clamour for more trains to run,  
 A thing much easier said than done.  
 The " Lines," however, try their best  
 To put the clamour soon to rest ;  
 Fresh trains are added by the score ;  
 And see them into Bombay pour  
 Each morn their tens of thousand  
     men,  
 And take them home as fast again  
 Each evening, when, their business  
     done,  
 They fly the town at set of sun ;  
 For men believed the microbe, mark,  
 Worked like a burglar, in the dark.

The first of India's cities, thou,  
 In wealth and fame, what art thou  
     now ?  
 Alas ! reduced to humble state,

Thy streets deserted, desolate,  
Thy streets that once were all so rife  
With busy hum of active life !  
Like bees men swarmed in every lane,  
And busy as the bees, 'twas plain,  
Each one intent on honest gain.  
In dress and colour, caste and creed.  
In mind and manners, thought and  
deed,

Where on earth such a varied host  
Can any town or city boast ?  
Now, silent as the grave these streets—  
A straggler here and there one meets.  
And where is gone this surging crowd  
That made the city look so proud ?  
A part unto that dismal bourne  
From which no traveller may return ;  
But most have fled to distant parts,  
Sad fugitives with bleeding hearts.  
The mills stop work for want of hands,  
Mill labour now high price commands;

Most schools are closed, and naughty  
boys

In their long holiday rejoice ;

The law-courts find small work to do,  
With litigants in town so few.

To trade and commerce turn your eye,  
A hopeless dead-lock there you spy ;  
Crores' worth of goods in godowns  
locked,

The merchants gone, all business  
blocked.

In every line and each vocation.

See want of life and dislocation ;

Where'er you turn, 'tis just the same.

Confusion on Plague's hated name !

Now " Disinfectants," that's the trade

In which the dealers fortunes made ;

For stores that lay unsold for years

At thrice the cost the trader clears ;

While other merchants murmur still,

How full of cash the chemist's till !

Carbolic acid, terebene,  
Eucalyptus, creosotine,  
And phenyle, cresol, naphthaline,  
Why, anything which had a smell,  
And a strange name, was bound to  
sell.

Some tons are spent in flushing sweet  
The stinking drains in many a street.  
Each individual boasts a store  
Of chemicals unheard before ;  
His clothes with phenyle one per-  
fumes,  
Another smells of chlorine fumes ;  
A third must carry, as a rule,  
Of camphor quite a pocketful ;  
With eucalyptus oil besmeared,  
A fourth the secret foe would beard ;  
Thus each doth on his person wear  
A coat of mail against the scare.

Like bullet darting through the air,

The loud report outrunning far ;  
Like flash of lightning from the  
clouds,

That in one sheet the land enshrouds,  
Swift speeds to every nation's ears,  
The story sad of Bombay's tears.  
By ties commercial closely bound  
To nations of the world around,  
A general favorite she, her fate  
Intense sensation doth create.

Their pity for her, though sincere,  
Is largely mixed with prudent fear,  
Lest contact with their tainted friend,  
Prove cause of trouble without end.  
Their ports they guard, unflinching  
they,

All doubtful goods to turn away ;  
Raw hides and wool, salt-fish and rags  
Are all tabooed by foreign flags ;  
Such goods as do find entrance there,  
Are disinfected first with care.

E'en passengers from Bombay must  
A week or two in harbour rust.

Like leper shunned by kith and kin,  
Who once had most belovèd been,  
But humbled now, who hides his head,  
And wishes he were with the dead,  
See Bombay under heaven's frown,  
With memories of past renown,  
Insulted, humbled, trodden down,  
Braved e'en by many a petty town,  
She keenly feels her loss of place,  
Her all unmerited disgrace !

Eight hundred thousand souls all told,  
Doth Bombay in small precincts  
hold ;

And what provision doth she boast,  
In times of sickness for this host ?  
One hospital of small pretence,  
Half-starved, forsooth, for want of  
pence,



To serve in times of pestilence !  
This hospital could hardly hold,  
The sick now coming in ten-fold ;  
Much less to every case in hand  
Give all the care it did demand.  
The staff work on with patient zeal,  
'Gainst heavy odds fight with a will.  
But many die, as many must,  
And soon they lose the people's trust ;  
A whisper goes that all the sick  
In hospital are poisoned quick ;  
This ugly rumour soon takes air,  
And people openly declare  
Their sick they never shall take there.  
Plague patients how to segregate,  
A question now of grave debate.  
To hospitals they would not go,  
Plain signs of rowdyism show.  
The Hindu fears to lose his caste,  
As much perhaps as breathe his last ;  
The Parsi grieves that he should die

Far from his friends and family ;  
The Moslem rather would be slain,  
Than see his women from him ta'en.  
A way is found out of this strait,  
Which pleases all at any rate,  
And saves much money to the state :  
That each community, each sect  
Should its own hospital erect,  
And nurse its sick with tender care.  
No fear of wholesale poisoning there !  
Jains, Parsis, Bhatias and the rest,  
Now willingly subscribe their best ;  
And hospitals to stop the scare,  
Crop up like mushrooms everywhere.  
Do not suppose vast buildings, pray,  
With wards palatial as they say,  
Physicians waiting night and day,  
Assistants by the score in pay,  
And kindly nurse with such sweet face,  
You hardly like to leave the place.  
No, ill-constructed cadjan sheds,

With crowded lines of lowly beds,  
 Physician calling when he can,—  
 His hands are full, poor busy man,—  
 And nurse or sweet or sour unknown,  
 To answer to the patient's groan.  
 I write not this, let me aver,  
 On honest work to cast a slur,  
 But just point out, the task not light,  
 Amid the city's woeful plight,  
 With scanty means this scourge to  
     fight.  
 Nor say I this of all, pray mind ;  
 Some few choice models of their kind,  
 Showed cash with heavy work com-  
     bined  
 Under an organizing mind.  
 One class of workers in those days  
 Must claim, indeed, their meed of  
     praise ;  
 Devoted to their work and name,  
 Nor caring aught for gold or fame,

Unmindful of the risk they ran,  
 They worked as women only can,  
 Nursed patients with a mother's care,  
 Their self-devotion past compare.  
 The Daughters of the Cross, I mean,  
 Sisters of Mercy true, I ween.  
 But it doth grieve me sore to tell,  
 True to the last, some martyrs fell.  
 By such example noble fired,  
 Some Parsi ladies too aspired  
 To work as nurses for their kind !  
 Nor nursed they with a stinting  
     mind ;  
 Though in the lap of plenty bred,  
 Yet, by true woman's instincts led,  
 They willingly preferred instead,  
 To work amid surroundings dread.

Now many European States  
 At heavy cost send delegates  
 The plague to study out and out,

Its cause, its course, its cure find out.  
 These scientists of great renown,  
 First move about the native town,  
 Observe the people and their ways,  
 Food more for pity than for praise.  
 To work this problem out they try  
 Find means to face the enemy.  
 Now human subjects, once so rare,  
 Are found by dozens if you care ;  
 Advanced research in active play,  
 And microbes watched both night and  
     day ;  
 Live monkeys, mice, and rabbits too,  
 With this good work have much to do.  
 But all research, howe'er abstruse,  
 And learned, is of little use,  
 Unless, in practice put, it save  
 Mankind from pain or from the grave.  
 One only scientist achieved  
 This noble object, and received  
 The blessings of a thankful nation

For this her unlooked-for salvation.

"Preventive serum,"—that's the word  
Scarce one in thousands e'er had  
heard ;

A household term it now became,  
And "Rasi," mark, its Indian name.

With syringe fine this fluid thin,

Injected just beneath the skin,

Preventive certain claimed to be

Against the dreadful "Bacilli."

Nor painless quite this treatment was,

For febrile symptoms it did cause,

And swellings,—made one feel so glum,

One nearly thought one's end had  
come,

Suspicious first, most men fought shy,

This new device they would not try ;

Suspicion soon to faith was turned,

Wide-spread renown the serum earned

With man and woman, youth and age,

The "Rasi" now became the rage.

The Parsis lead e'en in this race ;  
Their families now crowd the place ;  
They wait their turn from morn till eve,  
Not happy until they receive  
Into their blood this potent charm,  
This amulet against all harm.  
Yes, Doctor Haffkin, Russia's son,  
Thy duty thou hast nobly done ;  
What tens of thousand lives hast  
    saved,  
What studied opposition braved !  
Not only from the unthinking class,  
Th' illiterate, the unwashed mass,  
But men who make no small pretence  
To education and good sense.  
All o'er the world we know, 'tis true,  
The ignorant hate what is new,  
And stick to long exploded ways  
In vogue in their grandmother's days.  
But when those who for learned pass,  
Whose duty 'tis the inquiring mass,

The wavering populace, to teach,  
 Against this prophylactic preach,  
 Woe to the poor unguided host  
 Who need this one preventive most !

For long the Government stood by,  
 To see the Corporation try  
 What measures it considered best,  
 To fight the devastating pest.  
 Late in the day to all 'twas clear,  
 They thought it time to interfere ;  
 With sudden move took rein in hand,  
 Appointed quick a gallant band,  
 Armed with extensive powers, to  
     save  
 The city from her danger grave ;  
 The Gatacre Committee named,  
 Who business meant, and rules soon  
     framed,  
 Strict segregation to secure  
 For all the classes, rich and poor.



The city's dwindling purse must pay  
Their heavy bills—no small outlay.  
The Corporators seemed put out ;  
They felt they got a snub, no doubt ;  
With cheering words and soothing  
    smiles,  
The Government their wrath beguiles;  
Nor that dissension's time they know,  
But with one mind to fight the foe.  
The Justices, who stood aloof,  
Were called upon to give some proof  
Of gratitude and loyalty,  
And help the hard-worked committee ;  
To them were different streets as-  
    signed,  
Their work, too, of a novel kind :  
To search each house in every street,  
The plague's first onset quick to meet  
In certain quarters of the city.  
Nor safe, nor pleasant was their duty.  
The people looked at them askance,

Would *drive them out*, had they a  
chance.

Each time a patient was removed  
An angry mob soon gathering proved,  
By dagger looks and language rude,  
They'd knock them down, if but they  
could ;

And little rows and petty fights  
Were in these quarters common sights.  
They worked each morn from seven  
to ten,

These honest, self-denying men,  
From room to room, and floor to floor ,  
And opening every single door  
Of closet, kitchen, garret, store,  
They searched, and cases by the score  
Of sick and dying were revealed,  
E'en many dead and long concealed.  
A sight unique indeed one meets,  
Now walking down the native streets ;  
A solemn Justice on his beat,

See gravely tramping down the street,  
 Three native sepoys at his heels—  
 Quite like a potentate he feels ;  
 A Boree locksmith trotting find,  
 With heavy bunch of keys behind,  
 To pick the locks of rooms and chests,  
 Where e'en the least suspicion rests ;  
 A coolie next with crowbar see !  
 It looks like daylight burglary !

Like artisan in greasy shirt,  
 His face and hands besmirched with  
     dirt,  
 Begrimed with filth of years uncleared,  
 In Bombay many a street appeared.  
 Like that same artisan well washed,  
 And with a clean shirt on him tossed,  
 His face and hands and grisly hair,  
 All powdered o'er and looking fair,  
 The streets appear all fresh and bright,  
 Wrapped in one sheet of spotless white;

The gullies swept and flushed so clean,  
 As for long years they had not been ;  
 The houses lime-washed in a way  
 Would make one stare, the least to  
 say.

Distinction 'tween glass, wood, and  
 stone,

These warriors of the brush made  
 none ;

One brush all round, wall, window,  
 door,

The ceiling, casement, and the floor,  
 They white-washed thus near half the  
 city,

Thanks to the Gatacre Committee !

Now every human dwelling must  
 Pass muster, or be turned to dust ;  
 Hut, hovel, house, whate'er it be,  
 Must all submit to this decree ;  
 " Unfit for human habitation " !

This sentence of annihilation.  
 No sooner uttered than 'tis done,  
 That hut or hovel's race is run.  
 Some twenty men in Indian file,  
 Noisy and chattering all the while,  
 With ladders, staves, and pick and axe,  
 But ne'er a shirt unto their backs,  
 Captained by one with cane in hand,  
 In khaki suit, chief of the band,  
 Approach the doomed abode in haste—  
 They know they have no time to waste.  
 Some mount the roof, throw down the  
     tiles,  
 Some breach the walls and doors the  
     whiles,  
 The débris in a heap is laid,  
 And of it soon a bonfire made,  
 Thus huts by thousands are burnt  
     down,  
 That were an eyesore to the town.

One measure more remains unsung,  
Which murmur loud from people  
    wrung,

Whom, studious only of their ease,  
Each single measure must displease,  
That in the least did interfere  
With what they thought their comforts  
    dear.

All o'er the land the plague had sown  
His noxious seeds; the danger grown  
Out of these, to proportions huge,  
The Presidency would deluge,  
If towns went on exchanging free  
Their men, infected though they be.  
A measure now was put in force  
Which in its working did, of course,  
No inconvenience slight entail  
On passengers by boat and rail.  
The inward and the outward bound  
Subjected to exam. all round,  
Or ill, or if suspicious found,

Must there and then their journey  
close,

Some time in hospital repose,

Or observation camp at best,

Till found fit to mix with the rest.

This measure carried out with care,

The benefits were past compare.

The Committee seemed much in luck

What with good fortune, what with  
pluck,

What with the plague now on the wane,

What with hot weather come again.

Each day in deaths a marked decrease,

Sets people's minds much at their ease ;

See them to Bombay turning fast,

E'en half forgetful of the past.

The General with strength and tact

Discharged his duties, that's a fact.

In Bombay, with her motley throng,

In work like this to get along,

(Work odious at the very best),

Yet keep the people's minds at rest,  
Disclosed an organizing mind,  
With kindness, tact, and strength  
combined.



## SECOND YEAR.

---

The Plague had run his nine month's  
    . race,  
    And then he ceased to be ;  
The city 'gan to fill apace,  
    The people breathed more free.

All things appeared to promise well,  
    The reign of terror o'er,  
And few there were who could foretell  
    What trouble was in store.

Secure, yet unsafe all the same,  
    They lived, nor lived they long ;  
For soon once more the Plague became  
    The burthen of their song.

The city had, until the close  
Of the monsoon, a short repose,

Once more, e'er winter set in, came  
This visitor I hate to name.  
At his approach the city quakes,  
With dark forebodings how she shakes!  
Once more her frightened children wear  
A careworn look of sad despair.  
Once more, as in the past, they try,  
The accursèd town betimes to fly.  
But soon they find they have no choice  
They must obey the ruling voice.  
Now General Gatacre commands  
His Sovereign's troops in other lands ;  
In him the people felt they lost  
One who was in himself a host.  
Another in his place presides,  
The Plague Committee's work decides,  
Fresh regulations, day by day,  
Serve but the people to dismay.  
Strict daily search, detention camps,  
And that which most their spirits  
damps—

The forced removal of the sick,  
With other measures crowding thick,  
Plague-passes and land quarantine,  
Drove them to verge of madness clean.  
No one to hear their plaintive cries,  
Means of relief none to devise,  
No one to pity their distress !  
Their burning grievances redress !—  
Such were the ravings of the poor,  
Though oft misguided, suffering sure.  
The Eastern and the Western mind,  
To diff'rent ways of thought inclined,  
A gulf, at times, between them lies ;  
What this extols that one decries ;  
What this a call of duty deems  
To that mere wanton rigour seems.  
Plague measures carried out with zeal,  
Intending sure the city's weal,  
But zeal at times that clean forgot  
The humble Indian's ways of thought,  
Zeal misdirected, though well meant,

Gave rise to serious discontent.  
 Corruption, too, his ways untold,  
 That sneaking monster now grown bold,  
 With brazen face and vulture's claws  
 Exacts his toll, despite the laws,  
 With grasping hands his victims  
       claims

And much the people's wrath inflames.  
 The turbulent, some thousands strong,  
 Brooded o'er many a fancied wrong.  
 Like touch-wood waiting for the spark,  
 Like powder stored up in the dark,  
 On slight pretence their pent-up ire  
 Burst forth and spread like prairie fire.  
 From street to street, and lane to lane,  
 Flashed news of this wild hurricane,  
 Each moment swelled the frantic crowd,  
 Revengeful, shouting, yelling loud.  
 Plague hospitals they would burn  
       down,  
 Kill every *sahib* in the town.

Two unmolested passers-by  
Were done to death most cruelly.  
And witness now a harrowing scene,  
'Th' officials and the mob between.  
With staves and stones these madly  
sought  
Authority to set at naught ;  
Misguided men, by folly led,  
And vengefulness of folly bred !  
The town police worked with a will,  
'Gainst odds o'erwhelming fighting still,  
But soon they found how ill supplied  
They were to stem the swelling tide.  
Then marched out soldiers at the word,  
With bayonet fixed and gun and  
sword,  
And on the frenzied mob they fired,  
Some fell and on the spot expired ;  
Yet more lay bleeding, wounded, pale;  
Some hundreds were marched off to  
jail.

The rest, cowed down, now took to  
flight,  
And quiet reigned ere fall of night.  
Soon after Government resolved  
The Plague Committee be dissolved ;  
A Grievance Committee enrolled,  
That should its sittings daily hold,  
Long-standing grievances redress,  
Allay the popular distress,  
Chastise corruption brought to light,  
With kindly action set things right.  
To civic agencies besides  
Much power the Government confides.  
More smoothly now plague work is  
done,  
Under such auspices begun.  
The people feel once more at ease,  
All murmurs and heart-burnings cease.

### THIRD YEAR.

---

This year again, as in the past,  
The Plague his baneful shadows cast ;  
'Twere repetition vain, I deem,  
Expatriating on this theme ;  
In earnest prayers let us close,  
This city now may have repose.  
What lessons Plague has taught us,  
    hear,  
Plague unrelenting and severe ;  
And object-lessons too, I ween,  
Engraved in hearts with chisel keen.  
Oh ! that these lessons long may last,  
The memories of a tearful past !  
And teach the people, nature's laws  
Infringed, what dreadful havoc cause !  
Oh ! Filth, theme all unmeet for  
    verse,  
Our over-crowded city's curse,

What fatal vigour thou hast shown ;  
 How made a smiling city groan !

A fertile soil where seeds of woe  
 Luxuriant, like the weeds, they grow ;  
 For Filth and Plague, lo ! hand in  
     hand,

Like loving helpmates scour the land !  
 Filth in the humbler lanes and streets,  
 Filth in the poor man's house one  
     meets,

Filth in his clothes, filth in his skin,  
 Filth permeates his blood within,

And death the wages of the sin !

And why should dirt in dire embrace  
 Ingulf the humblest of the race ?

To want of means we grant 'tis true,  
 Much of the poor man's woe is due ;

For airy rooms and clothing clean,  
 And wholesome food, what do they  
     mean ?

So far our sympathy he draws,



The victim of unchanging laws ;  
 For let not men with wealth elate,  
 All to themselves ascribe their state,  
 Their own intelligence and pluck,  
 And nothing leave to chance or luck.  
 The sport of fickle fortune we,  
 Of good or ill dispenser He.  
 But when to want of sense he owes,  
 And ignorance, his cares and woes,  
 And habits born of laziness,  
 Who then shall pity his distress ?  
 Who suffers still, but will not mend,  
 He long must wait to find a friend,  
 If but the people now can see  
 How filth's allied to misery,  
 And mend their ways, the plague in-  
     deed,  
 Will then have sown a precious seed.  
 Another lesson Plague has taught,  
 And worthy too of serious thought :  
 The dwellings of the poor all round,

Unfit for human use were found ;  
Unventilated, dismal rooms,  
Dark, dank and dingy, much like  
tombs,

The portion of the labouring poor !  
Small credit to this city sure,  
To citizens who roll in wealth,  
And guardians of the public health.  
But let us bury now the past,  
And hope this lesson too may last,  
And such the poor man's quarters  
made,  
That nothing further need be said.

## CONCLUSION

---

Plague, thy gruesome work is done,  
Take thy face away, begone !  
Full one hundred thousand souls,  
Three years' havoc sad enrolls.  
For the present Bombay may  
Grieve, and rue the dismal day ;  
But her grief can never last,  
For she has resources vast.  
Shall the empire's second city,  
Be an object long of pity ?  
No ! a few short months and she  
Mistress of her fame shall be ;  
Trade and commerce broken down,  
Shall regain their past renown ;  
People brooding o'er their dead,  
Happier walks of life to tread,  
Once again shall lift their head.  
Blest in Queen Victoria's reign,  
Be thou soon thyself again !

## ALTERNATIVE INTRODUCTION.

---

Plague-stricken see now Bombay in  
her prime  
Of wealth and fame, commercial enterprise ;  
For all undreamt-of came there, lo ! a  
time  
Of death and woe in most insidious  
guise ;  
The cursed Plague all human skill  
defies ;  
Now seemed this princely city doomed  
to fall,  
Infected, humbled, woebegone she lies,  
Her people, led as by one general call,  
Desert their peaceful homes, the rich,  
the poor and all.

The powers that be are almost in despair,

Their efforts all seem doomed to go for naught,

When time at length and God Almighty's care

Work out a change, a change with prayers sought ;

The Plague dies out, with painful memories fraught,

Of ruin in a thousand shapes or more,

Of havoc sad in happy homesteads wrought.

Bombay revives, though slowly, stricken sore,

And promises to be the Bombay of before.

## NOTES.

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PAGE 3.—1. The Plague is now believed to have originated about the beginning of July, 1896, but in such a mild form as to have remained unrecognized till about the middle of August, when matters began to assume a serious aspect.

2. The Plague raged most during the months of January, February, and March 1897, and began to subside about the beginning of April, and by the end of June almost entirely disappeared.

PAGE 7.—*Mandvi*, a thickly crowded quarter in the east of the city, occupied generally by Hindus, especially Jains, Bhattias and Loharas.

PAGE 8.—*Mandvi* holds large stores of grain, and the wholesale destruction of rats there without any apparent cause naturally drew notice, though rather late in the day.

PAGE 9.—1. The rains of 1896 did more harm than good, with floods and serious damage to property on the one hand, and a distressing famine on the other.

2. The new system of drainage, unpopular with a large section of the people, came in for a share of very angry discussion.

PAGE 12.—They seemed, perhaps with very good intentions, distinctly unwilling to acknowledge the Plague, and gave in only when the reality became too stern for further trifling.

PAGE 13.—The Corporation could hardly see its way in the unforeseen calamity, and its best efforts gave small satisfaction to the people as they did not come to much.

PAGE 14.—For a long time flushing and fumigation seemed to be the only weapons the Municipality had against the plague; and fumigation as it was done was regarded even by many medical men as very much of a joke.

2. Segregation of plague patients without sufficient provision for them, and definite arrangements, led to false personation, extortion, and a variety of similar irregularities ending in the withdrawal of the order.

3. The plague started with Mandvi and for a time was confined to that quarter only, then it gradually spread out in all directions.

PAGE 15.—Worli, Nadar, Mahim, Sion and Bandra also got seriously affected.

PAGE 16.—1. It was a marked feature of the plague that the better classes as a rule escaped, and the ill-fed and ill-housed poor suffered most.

2. The filthy habits of the Bombay poor must be seen to be understood; their poverty may be answerable for a part, but their own ignorance and apathy in this matter is something extraordinary.

PAGE 17.—One of the terrors of the plague, entire homes being swept away.

PAGE 19.—Another distressing feature. The age of greatest havoc being between 12 and 25 years.

PAGE 20.—The heavy exodus in all directions, though it did relieve the city, helped to a considerable extent to spread the plague all over the Presidency.

PAGE 23.—The hospital is an object of aversion to the native mind even in ordinary times, and people would much rather die at home than take their chance of being cured in a hospital. The segregation arrangements on the present occasion seemed to them unaccountably harsh, especially as a large percentage died in hospitals.

PAGE 24.—This may appear insignificant to a mind untrained to Indian ways, but it formed a very important factor of disturbance with certain sections of the people.

PAGE 25.—Church Gate, Marine Lines, Churni Road, and Grant Road, on the B. B. & C. I. Ry. line, and Victoria Terminus and Byculla on the G. I. P. Ry. line, were scenes of unusual bustle and crowding day and night.

PAGE 26.—1. No unusual occurrence—notwithstanding the untiring exertions of the hard-worked railway officers.

2. The poorer classes left in coasting steamers for Alibag, Ratnagerry, &c.



PAGE 27.—That the Europeans escaped almost entirely is a potent fact, and it can be attributed to the reasons mentioned in the text, as even natives of the higher classes, well fed and in easy circumstances, escaped as a rule.

PAGE 29.—The rich and independent left Bombay for distant towns and hill stations. The middle classes could do nothing of the kind, yet must protect their families all the same—and suburban resorts were the only way out.

PAGE 31.—This used to be a general impression, and people who cheerfully worked in Bombay during the day, would not for the world stay in the city at night, the bacilli being believed to have unusual potency after sunset.

PAGE 32.—The deserted appearance of many of the streets in the native town was due to a great extent, to the closing of shops—whole lines of them being seen locked and double-locked, and here and there an inscription in chalk on the boards advertising the departure of the owner to his country.

PAGE 33.—1. The schools had to be closed perforce for want of pupils—Government schools like all other Government offices were kept open though with a small fraction of pupils.

2. Some of the Judges of the High Court and the Small Causes Court had to be deputed to other duties, for want of work in the courts.

3. There was indeed a large trade in disinfectants. Not to mention the vast quantities required by the Municipality, almost every individual had it in some shape or other in his house and about his person.

PAGE 34.—1. Little balls, about the size of marbles, smelling strongly of phenyle, were sold by the bushel, every day, and big jars generally filled with sweets, on the counters of petty shops, might now be seen full of these disinfectants.

2. Even whilst medicines were not uncommon, quinine was regularly used in a large number of families. Some put their faith in water exposed to the sun in bottles of blue glass, and many a paterfamilias might be seen dispensing very seriously every morning doses of this charmed liquid to all the members of his family.

PAGE 35.—The sensation created in Europe was something extraordinary. The English periodicals gave illustrations of plague scenes which could not but make a man in Bombay smile at their absurdity.

PAGE 36.—Arthur Road Hospital for contagious diseases, maintained by the Municipality—an institution of no very ambitious character.

PAGE 37.—As large numbers of patients died soon after admission, the belief became a very general one among the lower classes and led to considerable discontent and irritation.

PAGE 38.—1. The idea of allowing each sect to have its own private hospital where the sick could be nursed by their relatives was a happy one, and to some extent allayed the growing panic.

2. These hospitals were erected under considerable difficulties. Servants were hard to find, especially for work of such a nature. Buildings in crowded quarters were objectionable. Consequently cadjan sheds put up in open spaces were found the only alternative ; each community doing its best according to its own lights and resources.

PAGE 40.—Delegates from Russia, Germany, Austria, and other states came to Bombay, to study the plague. They were provided by Government with rooms in public buildings and every facility given to carry on their work.

PAGE 42.—1. Dr. Haffkin's preventive serum was one of the practical results of these scientific researches ; and though opinion may be divided yet, the believers in the serum seem to form an overwhelming majority.

2. Many kept back from using the treatment on account of the painful effects lasting for two or three days afterwards. Here too a nasty rumour was spread that the inoculation was likely to lead in the long run to leprosy. This frightened away no small number. The Hindus kept aloof on the score of religion,

PAGE 43.—1. The Parsis went in very largely for the inoculation, even little children.

2. Dr. Yersin also brought out a serum which was both preventive and curative, and being besides painless, many went in for it on that ground only. But Dr. Yersin's stock soon ran out.

PAGE 44.—The Gatacre Committee consisted of the following :—Brigadier-General W. F. Gatacre, C. B., President ; Surgeon-Captain Dimmock, Presidency Surgeon ; P. C. H. Snow, Esq., I.C.S., Municipal Commissioner ; C. C. James, Esq.; Major Cahusac, Secretary.

PAGE 45.—The Corporation did feel rather humbled, but the Municipal Commissioner being put on the Committee was no small consolation, and they were informed that their functions were not at all interfered with by such an appointment. That they should pay all expenses incurred by the committee did indeed appear somewhat humiliating, since they had no voice in its proceedings.

2. The enlistment of the Justices in the house-to-house visitation work was very well thought of, they being a class of men who could not possibly decline the work and who could be safely trusted at the same time to secure the confidence of the people.

PAGE 46.—In Bhendy Bazar, Falkland Road, Duncan Road, and other Mohamedan quarters.

PAGE 48.—1. Many of the streets in the native town were lime-washed in this somewhat unusual way by the Municipality ; the work being done generally by coolies, unused to it.

2. A Committee was appointed to go round inspecting houses, especially in the humble quarters of the town. Such as were doomed were marked with the ominous letters U.H H. Others had their tiles removed to admit light and air, their water pipes cut off to prevent damp, and similar precautionary measures adopted. Occasion was taken to burn down a large number of European Officers' quarters at Marine Lines on the U. H. H. plea.

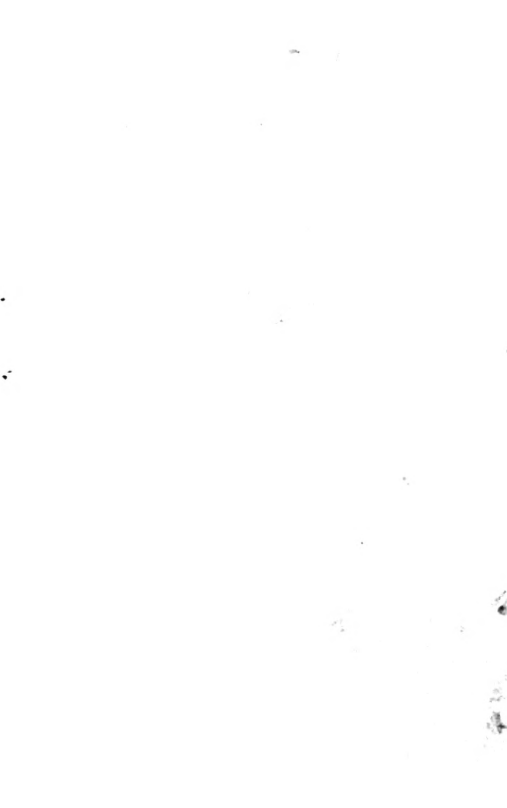
PAGE 51.—Whether the Gatacre Committee would have been so successful had it begun its operations a couple of months earlier may remain a question ; but this much must be acknowledged, that whatever assistance they may have received from natural conditions, the measures adopted by the committee were excellent.

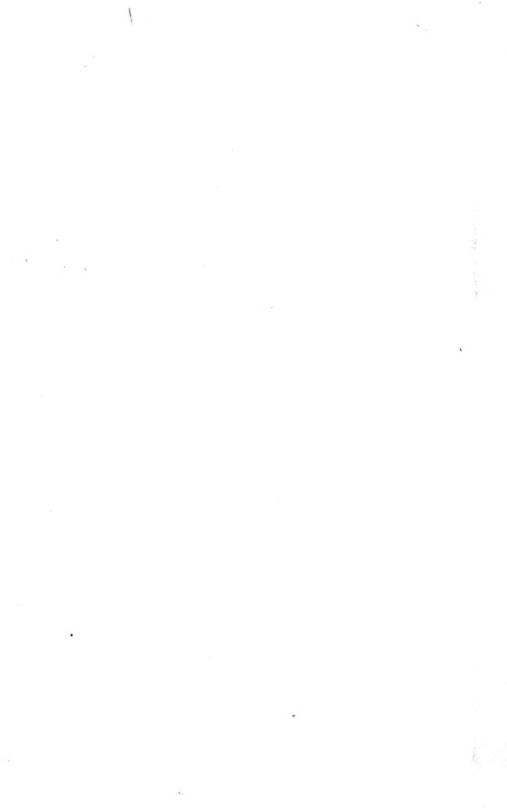
PAGE 52.—It is a matter of satisfaction that all the native communities appreciated General Gatacre's work, and the spontaneous gathering and the addresses he received on his departure for England show how tact, judgment and a kindly nature secure the goodwill of the Indian people.

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